

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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O R 171136Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9893
INFO USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
USCINCEUR

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EO 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, IR
SUBJ: IRAN: WHERE ARE WE NOW AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

REF: A) TEHRAN 7659 (NOTAL) B) TEHRAN 7456 (NOTAL) C) TEHRAN 7700 (NOTAL) D. TEHRAN
A-80 (NOTAL) E) TEHRAN 7702 (NOTAL).

SUMMARY: THE SHAH'S CONSTITUTION DAY SPEECH AND THE IMPOSITION OF MARTIAL LAW IN ISFAHAN INDICATE THAT HE IS COMMITTED TO THE LIBERALIZATION PROCESS BUT THAT THE GOI WILL DEAL MORE FIRMLY WITH THOSE WHO STIMULATE VIOLENCE. MAJOR QUESTION IS WHAT IMPACT RELIGIOUSLY INSPIRED AGITATION WILL HAVE ON IRANIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM AND WHAT GOVERNMENT'S REACTION WILL BE. POLITICAL VIOLENCE HAS BEEN TRADITION IN IRAN. SHAH IS ON A TIGHT ROPE--TRYING TO MINIMIZE VIOLENCE WHILE CHANNELING POLITICAL CONFLICT INTO
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ELECTORAL REALM. SUCCESS IS TO A CONSIDERABLE EXTENT DEPENDENT ON CONTINUED EXERCISE OF RESTRAIN BY ARMY AND SECURITY FORCES. WE BELIEVE HE MUST MANEUVER CAREFULLY, PERHPS INCLUDING SOME STEPS TO MEET OPPOSITION DEMANDS, IF VIOLENCE IS TO BE REDUCED. GIVEN THE NATURE OF THE OPPOSITION, HOWEVER, THE SHAH MAY ULTIMATELY HAVE TO RESORT TO FORCE. THE PRIMARY HOPE OF

AVOIDING THIS OPTION IS TO RESHAPE MODERATE OPPOSITION ATTITUDES AND IMPROVE GOVERNMENT SENSITIVITY IN THE PROCESS OF FURTHER POLITICAL ACTIVITY. END SUMMARY

1. WITH THE IMPOSITION OF MARTIAL LAW IN ISFAHAN AND THE STATIONING OF MORE MILITARY UNITS ELSEWHERE FOLLOWING CLOSELY ON THE HEELS OF THE SHAH'S CONSTITUTION DAY SPEECH(REFS A AND B) WHICH REAFFIRMED HIS COMMITMENT TO POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION, IT SEEMS A GOOD TIME TO REVIEW WHERE WE ARE AND TAKE A TENTATIVE AND SPECULATIVE LOOK AHEAD. THIS IS A PERIOD OF CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL TURMOIL IN IRAN FROM WHICH MANY OUTCOMES ARE THEORETICALLY POSSIBLE. MANY OF THE GIVENS OF THE PAST ARE BEING CALLED INTO QUESTION, NOT ONLY BY VOCAL OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME BUT BY THE SHAH HIMSELF.

2. IT IS CLEAR TO US AND THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS HERE THAT THE SHAH IS SINCERE IN HIS DESIRE TO LEAD IRAN TOWARD LIBERALIZED POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS (REF C). THERE IS SOME QUESTION IN HIS OWN MIND AS TO EXACTLY WHAT HE WANTS AND HOW HE IS TO ACHIEVE HIS BROAD OBJECTIVE, AND THERE REMAINS DEEP SUSPICION OF HIS INTENTIONS AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE LONG OPPOSED HIM. AFTER ALL, HE HAS NOT EVER WILLINGLY PLAYED THE DEMOCRATIC GAME BEFORE: WHY NOW? THE ANSWER, WE BELIEVE, IS IN HIS REAL BELIEF THAT HIS SON CANNOT SUCCESS-
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FULLY SUCCEED HIM UNLESS IRAN'S POLITICAL TRANSITION TO MORE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IS MANAGED BEFORE THE CROWN PRINCE TAKES THE THRONE. THE SHAH, MORE THAN ANY OTHER MODERNIZING MONARCH, IS CONCERNED WITH THE PROBLEM OF SUCCESSION. HE HAS STRESSED THE NEED TO PREPARE THE GROUND FOR HIS SON TO THE AMBASSADOR, TO ME, AND MOST FOREIGNERS HE RECEIVES. HE REMEMBERS HIS OWN DIFFICULT FIRST YEARS AND HAS GRADUALLY COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT ROOM MUST BE MADE FOR IRAN'S EXPANDING MIDDLE CLASS IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS. THIS DOES NOT MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT HE IS PREPARED TO TURN THE COUNTRY OVER TO MEN HE REGARDS AS UNPATRIOTIC, OBSCURANTIST AND IRRECONCILABLY HOSTILE TO THE MONARCH. THE CONTINUATION OF THE MONARCHY FOR THE SHAH IS MORE THAN SIMPLY AN ARROGANCE--HE WANTS THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY TO SURVIVE AND CONTINUE HIS POLICIES. HE DEEPLY BELIEVES THAT IRANIAN HISTORY PROVES THE NEED FOR A MONARCH TO GIVE THE LEAD TO HIS DISPARATE AND HETEROGENEOUS SOCIETY. HE IS, HOWEVER, PREPARED TO BEGIN A POLITICAL PROCESS DESPITE MISGIVINGS ABOUT SOME OF THE PLAYERS.

3. HOWEVER, MANY SO-CALLED LIBERAL OPPOSITION LEADERS

AT HEART BELIEVE HE SHOULD REMOVE HIMSELF FORTHWITH FROM THE GOVERNING PROCESS . MANY OF OUR CONTACTS WHO ADMIRE AND SUPPORT THE SHAH BELIEVE AS WELL THAT HIS INVOLVEMENT IN MOST DECISIONS SETS HIM UP AS THE TARGET FOR CRITICISM WHEN THE POLICIES IN PRACTICE DO NOT WORK WELL AND THAT HE SHOULD MOVE TOWARD REIGNING AND NOT RULING. A SUBSTANTIAL, IF NOT OVERWHELMING, MAJORITY OF IRANIANS HOWEVER AGREE WITH THE SHAH THAT THE MONARCHY REMAINS NECESSARY FOR THE COUNTRY BUT THEY WISH TO SEE ITS OPERATIONS ADJUSTED.

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4. THOSE FAMILIAR WITH THE MOSSADEQ PERIOD (1949-53) SEE NO EVIDENCE THAT MANY OF THE OPPOSITION LEADERS HAVE CHANGED THEIR OWN AUTHORITARIAN COLORATION DESPITE THEIR RHETORIC TODAY ABOUT CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES. RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION RETAINS THE VIOLENT ELEMENT THAT HAS MARKED SHIITE ATTITUDES TOWARD GOVERNMENT SINCE THE EIGHTH CENTURY. THERE ARE, OF COURSE, ALL STRAINS OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP, FROM THOSE FAVORING MODIFIED CONSTITUTIONAL RULE TO THOSE SEEKING A RETURN TO THE DAYS OF SHAH ABBAS. THERE IS ALSO AN ESSENTIALLY ANARCHIC MASS RESPONSIVE TO THE LOUDEST VOICE. THOSE RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS PRESENTLY DOMINATING THE IRANIAN SCENE, BOTH ORGANIZATIONALLY AND IDEOLOGICALLY, ARE COMMITTED TO VIOLENCE AND OBSTRUCTION AS TOOLS FOR ATTAINING POWER. AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI HAS

SPECIFICALLY CALLED FOR THE SHAH'S VIOLENT REMOVAL AND SOME OF HIS FOLLOWERS IN ISFAHAN AND SHIRAZ HAVE OPENLY CALLED FOR THE DEATH OF THE SHAH. (THIS EXTREMISM WAS IN PART THE REASON THE POLICE CRACKED DOWN ON THE HUNGER-
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STRIKING MULLAHS--TEHRAN 7618). MODERATES SUCH AS AYATOLLAH SHARIATMADARI DO NOT AT THIS TIME FEEL CAPABLE OF OPPOSING KHOMEINI OPENLY, THOUGH THEY REPORTEDLY STILL WORK FOR MODERATION WITHIN THE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT AND WOULD DOUBTLESSLY WELCOME A CHANCE TO PARTICIPATE IN AN ELECTORAL PROCESS WHICH MIGHT NOT LEAVE THEM WHOLLY SUBSERVIENT TO KHOMEINI, WHO REMAINS OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY. IN SHIA ISLAM THERE IS NO INSTITUTIONALIZED HIERARCHY: A RELIGIOUS LEADER ATTAINS HIS PROMINENCE BY CONSENSUS WITHIN HIS PARISH. SOME OF THE VIOLENCE WE ARE WITNESSING HERE RESULTS FROM A FERVID COMPETITION FOR EMINENCE BY THE AYATOLLAHS; MODERATION APPARENTLY DOES NOT BEGET FOLLOWERS FROM THE WORKERS, SMALL SHOP KEEPERS AND ARTISANS AT THIS TIME. A TRADITION OF THRONE/OPPOSITION DIALOG DOES NOT EXIST IN IRAN, AND NEITHER TEMPERMENT NOR TRADITION FAVOR WESTERN CONCEPTS OF POLITICAL CONCILIATION AND BROKERAGE.

5. WHATEVER THE SHAH WISHES TO DO NEXT, HE MUST MEET HEAD ON THE VIOLENT CHALLENGES TO BOTH HIS GOVERNMENT AND IRAN'S SOCIAL FABRIC. IMPOSITION OF MARTIAL LAW IS SEEN HERE AS A SIGNAL TO VIOLENT ELEMENTS THAT THIS TYPE OF ACTIVITY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. FOR IRAN, IT IS A SURPRISINGLY RESTRAINED REACTION SO FAR. THE ARMY HAS BEEN ORDERED TO HOLD ITS FIRE AND RESTRAINTS AGAINST PREMATURE POLICE USE OF WEAPONS REMAIN IN EFFECT. IRONICALLY, THIS LAUDABLE RESTRAINT HAS ITS DISADVANTAGES: MANY IRANIAN OF THE MIDDLE AND WEALTHY CLASSES BELIEVE THE SHAH IS NOT ACTING FORCEFULLY ENOUGH, THAT HE IS WEAK AND INDECISIVE. SOME BELIEVE THE AMERICANS FORCED HIM TO BE RESTRAINED, SINCE THEY CANNOT CONCEIVE OF HIS WILLINGNESS TO DO SO IN HIS OWN INTEREST. THE IMMEDIATE DANGER IS THAT THE SHAH HIMSELF (OR ARMY UNITS GOADED
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BEYOND PATIENCE) WILL REACT INDISCRIMINATELY AND ATTEMPT TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM WITH BULLETS INSTEAD OF BALLOTS. THE ARMED FORCES ARE NOT LIKELY TO DO SO UNLESS OPPOSITIONISTS MOVE FROM STONES TO FIREARMS.

6. MANY OBSERVERS HERE HOPE THAT THE END OF RAMAZAN WILL BRING SOME SURCEASE BUT WE ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY DUBIOUS. THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS, EVEN THE MODERATES, ARE FEELING THEIR OATS AND ARE UNLIKELY, WE BELIEVE, TO EASE OFF THE PRESSURES UNTIL THEY RECEIVE AT LEAST SOME SATISFACTION. THE SHAH IS ON THE CLEFT STICK AT THE MOMENT. HE COULD ALMOST CERTAINLY SUCCESSFULLY SUPPRESS THE RELIGIOUS DISSIDENTS

FOR THE TIME BEING BY MASS ARRESTS AND VERY CONSIDERABLE BLOOD LETTING. IT WOULD NOT BE EASY, HOWEVER BECAUSE UNLIKE 1963, DISSIDENT ACTIVITIES ARE WIDESPREAD IN THE COUNTRY AND VANDALISM IS USUALLY PERPETRATED BY A NUMBER OF GROUPS IN SEPARATE PARTS OF THE CITIES AND TOWNS. IF HE TAKES THIS PATH, HOWEVER, IT WOULD NEGATE HIS OBJECTIVE OF LIBERALIZATION AND BRING DOWN ON HIMSELF SIGNIFICANT FOREIGN CRITICISM TO WHICH HE IS SENSITIVE.

7. THE SHAH AND THOSE AROUND HIM, WE NOW BELIEVE, HAVE UNDERESTIMATED THE CHALLENGE. IRAN REMAINS BY AND LARGE A CONSERVATIVE ISLAMIC STATE AND, ONCE LIBERALIZATION OPENED THE POLITICAL SCENE, THE LOCAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS AGAIN BECAME THE CENTERS OF POLITICAL POWER--AS THEY WERE WHEN THE LID WAS PUT ON IN 1963. (OUR A-80 DEALT WITH SOME OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL/ECONOMIC/SOCIAL FACTORS WHICH HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE FRUSTRATIONS HERE.) ALSO, SINCE THAT TIME COMMUNICATIONS HAVE VASTLY IMPROVED IN THIS COUNTRY AND THE VARIOUS LEADERS CAN DAILY STAY IN TOUCH WITH EACH OTHER. NEITHER THE INTELLECTUALS AND BUREAUCRATS OF THE RASTIKHIZ PARTY, THE OLD NATIONAL FRONTIERS, NOR THE LEADERS OF THE NEW GROUPS HAVE DEEP-ROOTED POLITICAL POWER OR INFLUENCE. IN THE PRESENT POLITICAL AND SOCIAL
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SCENE, THE GOVERNEMENT CANNOT AVOID DEALING WITH THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS.

8. THE EARLIER EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A DIALOGUE WITH THE MORE MODERATE LEADERS WERE NOT PURSUED WITH MUCH VIGOR AND THE OBJECTIVE OF SPLITTING THE RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP HAS SIMPLY NOT WORKED SO FAR. PART OF THE REASON FOR THIS LATTER FAILURE HAS BEEN THE THREATS AND HARASSMENT OF THE MODERATES BY THE WELL-ORGANIZED KHOMEINI FANATICS; ALSO, AS NOTED EARLIER, NO AYATOLLAH WISHES TO LOSE HIS FOLLOWERS BY APPEARING SOFT. FURTHERMORE, THE AMOUEGAR GOVERNMENT (AS OPPOSED TO THE SHAH AND THE COURT) HAS PROVED SURPRISINGLY INEPT AT DEALING WITH RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS ON ANYTHING OTHER THAN A TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT BASIS.

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9. IF OUR GENERAL ASSESSMENT IS VALID, THE SHAH HAS TO FIND A WAY TO OPEN SERIOUS GIVE AND TAKE WITH THE SO-CALLED RELIGIOUS (AND SOME POLITICAL) MODERATES (THIS WILL BE HARD TO SWALLOW BECAUSE OF HIS UTTER DISDAIN FOR "THE PRIESTS"). WE SHOULD REALIZE AT THE OUTSET THAT THIS MAY ULTIMATELY PROVE IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE OF THEIR ULTIMATE DEMANDS (AS OPPOSED TO WHAT THEY MIGHT ACCEPT AS A PART OF AN ON-GOING PROCESS) WOULD MEAN RELIGIOUS CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT AND REDUCTION OF THE SHAH TO A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCH. THE SHAH WOULD NEVER ACCEPT THE FIRST AND WOULD SEE THE LATTER EMERGING ONLY IN THE CONTEXT OF RULE PASSING TO HIS SON. THE CURRENT "WANT LIST" OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP IS UNCLEAR, BUT WE UNDERSTAND THAT CHANGE OF PRIME MINISTER AND AT LEAST SOME CABINET MEMBERS TOPS THE LIST--THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN TOO TARRIED WITH THE VIOLENCE OF THE PAST EIGHT MONTHS AND IS SEEN AS NOT AT ALL RESPONSIVE TO THE RELIGIOUS CONSTITUENCY.

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EVEN SOME ESTABLISHMENT FIGURES NOW TALK THIS WAY PRIVATELY.

ACTION AGAINST INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE WIDELY PERCEIVED TO HAVE CORRUPTLY BENEFITED FROM IRAN'S RECENT DEVELOPMENT IS NEXT. THIS IS A PARTICULARLY TOUGH ONE BECAUSE THE POPULACE HAS SEEN ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGNS COME AND GO AND A NEW EFFORT WILL HAVE NO CREDIBILITY UNLESS PERSONS VERY CLOSE TO THE SHAH ARE AT LEAST REPRESENTED IN ANY ROUNDUP. A NUMBER OF LESSER MATTERS ALSO REQUIRE ACTION: MORE HAJ SEATS AND BETTER ALLOCATION OF EXISTING CAPACITY BY IRAN AIR, MORE RESTRAINED MOVIE ADVERTISING, ETC.

10. CONCESSIONS OF THIS NATURE MIGHT AT LEAST BRING THE MODERATES INTO THE POLITICAL PROCESS AND PERMIT THE GOI TO DIRECT ITS POLICE AND INTELLIGENCE EFFORTS AGAINST EXTREMISTS WHO ARE UNDOUBTEDLY RECEIVING HELP FROM EX-TUDEH PARTY ELEMENTS, AND OTHER OUTSIDE FORCES. HOWEVER, GIVEN THE ORGANIZATIONAL FLUIDITY OF THE OPPOSITION, ITS PENCHANT FOR PRESSING FOR THE JUGULAR RATHER THAN COMPROMISING AND SIMPLY THE EVANESCENT NATURE OF PUBLIC OUTBREAKS OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, EVEN THIS MIGHT NOT BE ENOUGH. AT SOME POINT, THE SHAH MAY BE FORCED TO REPRESS AN OUTBREAK WITH THE IRON FIST AND NOT THE VELVET GLOVE IF IRAN IS TO RETAIN ANY ORDER AT ALL. WE HAVE NO DOUBT THAT HE WILL DO SO IF THAT BECOMES ESSENTIAL. HE IS NOT DEALING WITH DEMOCRATIC GROUP POLITICS AS WE IN THE WEST KNOW AND PLAY THEM, AND HE IS MINDFUL OF WHAT VACILLATION BROUGHT AYUB KHAN AND BHUTTO IN PAKISTAN.

11. FOR THE U.S. AS WELL THIS IS A DELICATE PERIOD. AS WE HAVE MENTIONED IN PREVIOUS REPORTING, VIRTUALLY ALL IRANIANS BELIEVE THAT FOREIGN HANDS ARE INVOLVED IN WHATEVER HAPPENS HERE. WHATEVER WE AS A GOVERNMENT OR
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AS OFFICIALS SAY WILL BE MISCONSTRUED BY SOMEBODY HERE EITHER AS SUPPORT FOR OR OPPOSITION TO THE SHAH. THIS PERCEPTION OF INFLUENCE IN FACT GIVES US SOME INFLUENCE. WE WILL HAVE FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON OUR ROLE HERE OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS AFTER THE AMBASSADOR RETURNS.

12. DEPARTMENT REPEAT TO OTHER POSTS AS DESIRED.
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